

Mazaris's Journey to Hades:
Further Reflections and Reappraisal

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THE PROSE WORK ENTITLED *Mazaris's Journey to Hades* was written between January 1414 and October 1415, less than forty years before the Byzantine Empire finally fell to the Ottoman Turks. One of the last major works of Byzantine learned humor, it purports to consist of a satirical attack by an author called Mazaris on his colleagues and contemporaries in the imperial service, who either have recently died or are still in office. The first part of the work takes the form of a narrative in which Mazaris speaks in the first person recording the conversations he has had with others in the underworld. This is followed by a dream and three letters that comprise a series of attacks on the inhabitants of the Peloponnese as a whole and then particular targets there, a case in point the whining doctor Malakes. The work has long been valued for its depiction of bureaucratic life and has been mined for prosopographical details of the careers of fifteenth-century public servants. There has been less unanimity, however, regarding its literary merit and, in particular, insufficient appreciation of the humor that powers the work.

The various parts of the work can be summarized as follows: in part one (set in January 1414) the narrator, Mazaris, is brought to Hades before his time by a plague in the capital (the mechanics of his translation to the other world are not made entirely clear). In the underworld he meets Manuel Holobolos (or, more correctly, Olobolos), a disgraced imperial secretary who recounts the story of his misfortunes and recent death. When Holobolos begins to abuse his predecessor Padiates, whom he had supplanted, Padiates leaps out from a nearby bush and, after much mutual invective and plain speaking, attacks Holobolos with his walking stick. In response to the call for help, Pepagomenos arrives, a doctor who is described as having been an adept poisoner; he, and then a series of deceased courtiers, enquire of Mazaris how their sons are doing at court and engage in tirades about their successors and bureaucratic corruption on earth. Finally Holobolos asks Mazaris on his return to the world above to take a message to the emperor's relative Asan who is still on earth. Because Mazaris is in total disgrace in Constantinople, Holobolos advises him to settle instead in the Peloponnese.

In parts two and three of the work, set in September 1415, Mazaris is in the Peloponnese. He complains to Holobolos in a dream that the move to the Peloponnese was not a success and in response to a request writes Holobolos a letter (dated 21 September 1415) denouncing the

ethnic groups of the Peloponnese and the local barons. A further pair of documents (dated 16 and 21 October 1415) present Holobolos's ridicule of the rich doctor Nikephoros Doukas Palaiologos Malakes, who has had to exchange the comforts of the capital for misery in the Peloponnese, together with Malakes' reply. Manuscript B (Berol. gr. 173) also contains a concluding dedication.

Mazaris's Journey, though an important text, has been generally seen as a debased example of Byzantine humor, as exemplified in the popular genre of the "dialogues of the dead." It has thus been treated contemptuously by modern scholars with regard to both its humor and literary merits, with just one exception.¹ Criticism began with Henry Tozer who in 1896 considered the writer "a man of a bitter and malevolent spirit, who took the worst view of the men of his time, and was greatly influenced by personal spite and jealousy"; Karl Krumbacher in 1897 characterized it as a weak imitation of Lucian;² John W. Barker saw it as a "violently and scurrilously vituperative picture of the selfish, grasping, unscrupulous and immoral courtiers of the early fifteenth century";³ Christopher Robinson considered that "the personal satire is conducted in a tone of almost unrelieved invective";⁴ and the editors of the Buffalo Seminar Classics edition in 1975 (from whom, perhaps, one might have expected a more empathetic approach) write of its "dubious literary merits. . . . The work gives the impression that the whole thing is little more than an exercise in abuse"⁵—yet a taste for abuse was an innate part of the Byzantine mentalité and a constituent of most Byzantine humor. The *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* omits any discussion of its merits (or otherwise) as literature, simply quarrying it for details of Byzantine prosopography and information regarding the construction of the Hexamilion, and the work is listed in *Byzantine Sources in Translation* under not literature but Byzantine political documents.⁶ Up to the present, in fact, *Mazaris's Journey* has mainly been valued as a

1 Much has been done in this regard by Barry Baldwin; note esp. his "A Talent to Abuse: Some Aspects of Byzantine Satire," *ByzF* 8 (1982): 19–28; Baldwin, "The Mazaris: Reflections and Reappraisal," *ICS* 18 (1993): 345–58, where he notes the more subtle elements of its humor, and points out verbal echoes from contemporary texts, such as the *Chronicon Minus* of George Sphrantzes and the letters of Manuel II.

2 K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinische Literatur: Von Justinian bis zum Ende des oströmischen Reiches*, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1897), 494: "Die Hadesfahrt des Mazaris ist zweifellos die schlechteste der bis jetzt bekannt gewordenen Imitationen des Lukian"; cf. H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (Munich, 1978), 2: 157: "Frostige Assonanzen und Paronomasien finden sich allenthalben."
3 *Manuel II Paleologus (1391–1425): A Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1969), 406.

4 C. Robinson, *Lucian and His Influence in Europe* (London, 1979), 80.

5 J. N. Barry, M. J. Share, A. Smithies, and L. G. Westerink, eds., *Mazaris' Journey to Hades; or Interviews with Dead Men about Certain Officials of the Imperial Court* (Buffalo, 1975), vii. All citations from the text refer to this edition and use this translation.

6 "Mazaris," *ODB* 2: 1324–25; *Byzantine Sources in Translation*, ed. Paul Halsall, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/byzantium/alltexts.html>, last updated 12 October 1997.

historical and prosopographical source for the careers of a number of courtiers of the time of Manuel II Palaiologos (1391–1425).⁷

Mazaris's *Journey and Dialogues of the Dead*

The setting of *Mazaris's Journey* follows the tradition of the διάλογος νεκρικός (dialogue of the dead), in which a protagonist descends to the underworld and converses with the dead—in this it is reminiscent of the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, of Aristophanes' *Frogs*, and of the dialogues of Lucian (especially the *Menippus*, *Kataplous*, *Dialogues of the Dead*, and *Charon*) to which it owes an extensive debt. The setting of the *Journey to Hades* is essentially Lucianic, but the work as a whole owes most to Aristophanes, in terms of the language, insult tradition, and general ambience; while the *Clouds* and *Ploutos* of Aristophanes are frequently cited. The author knows the standard classical texts, though without showing any marked erudition: his numerous citations of Aristophanes come from the standard three plays studied in Byzantine schools, the *Ploutos*, *Clouds*, and *Frogs* (plus occasionally the *Knights*).⁸ *Mazaris's Journey* has also a number of Byzantine predecessors from the twelfth century onwards, following the revival of interest in Lucian's works in the twelfth-century "renaissance." Not only do we have the Lucianic imitations the *Philopatris*, the *Charidemus*, and the *Timarion* (attributed variously to Michael Italikos, Theodore Prodromos, and Nicolas Kallikles), a text that the author of the *Journey to Hades* may perhaps have known;⁹ there are two further dialogues, one a political satire perhaps written in 1185 by Basil Padiadites, later metropolitan of Corcyra, while the other (perhaps also of the twelfth century) features a dialogue among Hermes, Alexander, and Charon. In addition, Gyula Moravcsik in 1931 edited four dialogues with Charos (three of them acrostic), which appear to be forerunners of the Greek folksong tradition,¹⁰ while Cretan

7 E. Trapp, R. Walther, and H. V. Beyer, eds., *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit* (Vienna, 1976–96): Mazaris himself is listed in the *Lexikon* as no. 16117; see also E. Trapp, "Zur Identifizierung der Personen in der Hadesfahrt des Mazaris," *JÖB* 18 (1969): 95–99.

8 Baldwin, "Reflections and Reappraisal," 354–55 (above, n. 1) notes the debt to the *Frogs* in terms of details and the general mise-en-scène. On Aristophanes' plays and the works of other classical dramatists in the school curriculum, see N. G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, rev. ed. (London, 1996).

9 Certainly the *Timarion* was known, and vilified, by Constantine Akropolites

(who died c. 1324) (R. Romano, "Per l'edizione dell'epistolario di Costantino Acropolita," *RendAccNap* 56 [1991]: 83–103; M. Treu, "Ein Kritiker des Timarion," *BZ* 1 [1892]: 361–65); B. Baldwin, *Timarion* (Detroit, 1984), 24–26, gives an English translation of Akropolites' letter. On the *Timarion*, see esp. M. Alexiou, "Literary Subversion and the Aristocracy in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: A Stylistic Analysis of the *Timarion* (ch. 6–10)," *BMGS* 8 (1982/83): 29–45.

10 Note esp. K. A. Manaphes, "Ἀνέκδοτος νεκρικός διάλογος ὑπαινισσόμενος πρόσωπα καὶ γεγονότα τῆς βασιλείας Ἀνδρονίκου Α' τοῦ Κομνηνοῦ," *Ἀθηνᾶ* 76 (1976–77): 308–

22; trans. L. Garland, "A Treasury Minister in Hell: A Little-Known 'Dialogue of the Dead' of the Late Twelfth Century," *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 16/17 (2000/2001): 481–99; O. Karsay, "Eine byzantinische Imitation von Lukianos," *ActaAntHung* 19 (1971): 383–91; cf. D. A. Christides, "Γιὰ τὴ βυζαντινὴ μίμηση τοῦ Λουκιανοῦ στὸν κωδ Ambrosianus gr. 655," *Ἑλληνικά* 32 (1980): 86–91; S. Lambakis, *Οἱ καταβάσεις στὸν κάτω κόσμο στὴ βυζαντινὴ καὶ στὴ μεταβυζαντινὴ λογοτεχνία* (Athens, 1982), 94–95; G. Moravcsik, "Il Charonte bizantino," *RSBN* 3 (1931): 47–68.

literature features the allegorical Ἀπόκοπος of Bergadis and the moralizing Πίμα θρηνητική of Ioannis Pikatoros.¹¹ *Mazaris's Journey* has therefore to be seen as part of a popular, multifaceted literary tradition employing the underworld for satirical or moralizing purposes.

In terms of its scurrility and invective, too, *Mazaris's Journey* is indisputably in the Byzantine tradition. One of the main features of the work is its love of abusive language (though it is hardly “unrelieved invective,” as suggested by Robinson). Byzantine humor at all levels was always given to insults and abuse, and the more scholarly the writers the greater the abuse. Making fun of others was seen as a pleasant and relaxing way of exercising one’s wit: the twelfth-century archbishop Eustathios of Thessalonike recounts an incident in which two teachers of philosophy amused themselves on their day off by sitting by the roadside outside Constantinople and insulting travelers.¹² The twelfth century, indeed, saw the most extensive flowering of abusive humor with the scholars Prodromos and Tzetzes. “Possessed and epileptic, moonstruck son of a goat (τράγου υἱέ, σεληνιαζόμενε, δαιμονῶν καὶ ἐπίληπτε)” is, for example, one of John Tzetzes’ remarks in his commentary on Aristophanes’ *Frogs* when he attacks a critic who had denounced Tzetzes’ gloss of a rare term for a moth.¹³ In another note on the *Ploutos*, he attacks a grammarian who proposed the existence of dichronic vowels in Homer, describing “a ghostly presence, scabbed with camel disease, cat-faced, anchovy-eyed, with the voice of a weeping eunuch.”¹⁴ This is invective at its best. Similarly Theodore Prodromos’s *Philoplaton* or the *Tanner of Leather* compares a fellow scholar who intends to “improve” on the works of Plato to “a pig with a brilliant jewel dangling from its snout . . . a monkey with a golden slingshot in its hands”—this straw Praxiteles, his skin full of filth and hands marked by calluses and cuts, should return to his manual occupations instead of swallowing Platos in their entirety.¹⁵

Criticisms of the bureaucracy, in particular of jumped-up or incompetent officials, were particularly prevalent from this period—we can

11 St. Alexiou, “Ἀπόκοπος,” *Κρ. Χρον.* 17 (1964): 183–251; Πίμα θρηνητική εἰς τὸν πικρὸν καὶ ἀκόρεστον Ἄιδην, in *Carmina graeca medii aevi*, ed. W. Wagner (Leipzig, 1874), 224–41; E. Kriaras, “Ἡ ῥίμα θρηνητική τοῦ Ἰωάννου Πικατόρου,” *Ἐπ. Μεσ. Ἀρχ.* 2 (1942): 20–69.

12 P. Magdalino, “Byzantine Snobbery,” in *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. M. Angold (Oxford, 1984), 70. See L. Garland, “And His Bald Head Shone Like a Full Moon: An Appreciation of the Byzantine Sense of Humour as Recorded in

Historical Sources of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries,” *Parergon* n.s. 8 (1990): 1–31, esp. 6–20; for insults by the populace, see also Garland, “Political Power and the Populace in Byzantium Prior to the Fourth Crusade,” *BSI* 53.1 (1992): 17–52.

13 John Tzetzes, *Commentarii in Aristophanem*, ed. L. Massa Positano, D. Holwerda et al. (Groningen/Amsterdam, 1960–62), 835.9; M. J. Jeffreys, “The Nature and Origins of the Political Verse,” *DOP* 28 (1974): 149–50 and notes 22–24; Robert Browning, “Byzantine Scholarship,” *Past*

and Present 28 (1964): 14, speaks of Tzetzes’ “scurrilous venom.”

14 Tzetzes, *Scholia in Aristophanem*, 43.21–44.2: σκιᾶς ἀμυδρᾶς ἀχλυῶδης οὐσία, / ψώρα καμήλου πᾶν κατωστρακωμένον, / αἰλουροειδὲς ὀμπατέγγραυλον τέρας / φωνήν τινος κλαίοντος εὐνούχου φέρον . . .

15 G. Podestà, “Le Satire Lucianesche di Teodoro Prodromo,” *Aevum* 21 (1947): 3–12; cf. M. J. Kyriakis, “Satire and Slapstick in Twelfth-Century Byzantium,” *Byzantina* 5 (1973): 293–95.

especially note the narratives of Niketas Choniates and Eustathios of Thessalonike, in particular their attacks on John Kamateros and Stephen Hagiochristophorites.¹⁶ Prominent literary examples of such invective are the twelfth-century *Anacharsis* and the fifteenth-century *Skatablattas*. The first denigrates Anacharsis (delighted with Anna), so called from the name of his second wife, Anna, who happens in fact to be a baptized frog. Anacharsis, or John (arguably John Kamateros), is shown as a total failure—as a musician, warrior, rider, hunter, secretary, and astrologer—and easily outwitted by the Jews, as in this second marriage.¹⁷ The *Skatablattas* is a fifteenth-century invective, possibly by John Argyropoulos, against Katablattas, an ex-Ottoman foot-soldier, called in the text Skatablattas (from σκατό, a derivative of the classical σκῶρ, “excrement”). After teaching in Thessalonike and working as a scribe in the city tribunal, he has inveigled himself into the palace and the despot’s good books and is shown as misusing his time in gorging, guzzling, singing, and dancing.¹⁸

Furthermore, in fourteenth-century vernacular satire there are the Διήγησις τοῦ Πωρικολόγου and the Ὁψαρολόγος (Fruit Book and Fish Book), which parody legal procedures and the ceremonial and officials of the imperial court.¹⁹ Other fourteenth-century vernacular animal fables consist primarily of a flow of often-obscene insults against all rivals—in these unique works, animals, birds, and even fruits assemble to stand up in pairs and direct a flow of insulting terms at each other; there is also a subtext of satirical social criticism. Magdalino notes of the popular vernacular texts the *Poulologos* and the *Tale of the Four-Footed Beasts* that “these works may or may not lampoon well-known contemporaries and comment bitterly on social inequalities, but what they quite unmistakably reflect is the chronic individualism of Byzantine society—the fact that when its members are brought together and have the chance to speak freely, there is no mutual respect of community of interest, even among members of the same class, but all use their energy in singing their own praises and heaping insults on all who rank anywhere near them, every man

¹⁶ On such attacks, see esp. Garland, “Bald Head,” 1–31 (above n. 12); Garland, “Stephen Hagiochristophorites: *Logothete tou genikou* 1182/83–1185,” *Byzantion* 69.2 (1999): 18–23. For the gluttony and vulgarity of the logothete John Kamateros, see esp. J.-L. van Dieten, ed., *Nicetae Choniatae Historia* (Berlin/New York, 1975), 113–14.
¹⁷ For the “Anacharsis,” see D. A. Chrestides, ed., *Markiana Anekdotia* (Thessalonike, 1984), 205–90; cf. the twelfth-century “biography,” in the form of a legal

indictment, of a certain Bagoas, which shows him as a hypocritical, well-educated catamite, who managed to worm his way into the palace, as well as committing sacrilege in having icons in a church smeared with honey (A. Garzya, ed., *Nikephorus Basilaca. Orationes et Epistulae* [Leipzig, 1984], 92–110).

¹⁸ P. Canivet and N. Oikonomides, “La Comédie de Katablattas: Invective byzantine du XVe s.,” *Δίπτυχα* 3 (1982–1983): 5–97.

¹⁹ Διήγησις τοῦ Πωρικολόγου, in *Carmina graeca medii aevi*, ed. Wagner, 199–202; trans. M. C. Bartusis, “The Fruit Book,” *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 4 (1988): 205–12; K. Krumbacher, “Das mittelgriechische Fischbuch,” *SMünchen* (1903): 345–80.

intoxicated with his own flow of words.”²⁰ While *Mazaris’s Journey* stands within the tradition of the *dialogos nekrikos*, its context and content is decidedly contemporary.

The Narrator and Protagonists of Mazaris’s Journey

We have no knowledge of the author of *Mazaris’s Journey* apart from details referring to the “narrator” in the text itself, which have generally been taken to be autobiographical, even though there are difficulties in taking the text at face value. Attempts have been made to identify this “Mazaris” with a fourteenth-century copyist, a Mazaris who copied Cod. Paris. gr. 2958, as well as with the monk Maximos Mazaris, who composed grammatical canons; there was also a Manuel Mazaris who was the author of a legend about Saint Irene.²¹ But the truth is that we know nothing of “Mazaris,” apart from what the text purports to tell us. The narrator states about “himself” that he had been in office on the island of Lemnos when Manuel II took his journey to western Europe to ask for financial aid between 1399 and 1402, and thus he missed the chance of accompanying the emperor (62.4–9). He then stayed on Lemnos out of loyalty to Manuel when John VII went to Thessalonike (36.14–15), which implies that Mazaris was one of the high-flying public servants of his time, in that Manuel’s retinue on his journey to Venice, Padua, Paris, and London was relatively small: the highest estimate for the retinue is fifty-eight, which would presumably have included personal attendants as well as secretaries and ministers. On 26 February 1403 the Venetian senate agreed to provide armed vessels to transport Manuel with a retinue of twenty-five to thirty persons from Venice to Modon, while the rest of the retinue would have to travel in unarmed ships; on 2 March this was emended to transport for forty attendants.²²

The fact, too, that Mazaris suffered from gout—sufferings that are reiterated throughout the work—seems to imply that he had enjoyed a high standard of living and luxury (he is frequently described as “limping,” as at 6.20–21, 24.30, 36.1, 62.17, 68.8). His career, we are told, ended ignominiously as the result of a plot in which he was falsely “accused of embezzlement and fell into disgrace” (36.20–22, 40.12), and there are references later in the work hinting that he has been the victim of his colleagues’ competitive jealousy: at 44.30–32 he mentions a certain Aspietaos, who is given to pleasant talk, but acts like a

20 Magdalino, “Byzantine Snobbery,” 62 (above, n. 12); I. Tsabari, ed., *Πουολόγος* (Athens, 1987); V. Tsiouni, ed., *Παιδιόφραστος διήγησις τῶν ζώων τῶν τετραπόδων* (Munich, 1972).

21 *PLP* 16120, 16121, 16122; Sp. Lampros, “Mazaris und seine Werke,” *BZ* 5 (1896): 63–73; Barry et al., *Mazaris’ Journey*, xx (above, n. 5); see G. Theodorides, “Τέσσαρες Βυζαντινοὶ καθολικοὶ κριταὶ λανθάνοντες ἐν βυζαντινῷ γνωστῷ κειμένῳ,” *Makedonika*

4 (1955–1960): 496, for a suggestion identifying the author with John Mazaris, ὁ σκελλίου of the church of St. Menas in Thessalonike in 1419/20.

22 Barker, *Manuel II Paleologus*, 228–29, 232 n. 60 (above, n. 4).

biting adder (“I have been bitten by him myself!,” he adds). This could refer to rivalry within the service, but may simply serve as an authorial aside to reinforce the joke on his colleague’s snakelike name.

As well as ignominy, banishment from court, public ridicule, and poverty, Mazaris has also suffered the early loss of his children and, like Strepsiades in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, the misfortune of a nagging wife, “the beginning of all his troubles” (40.1–8, 11, 14–15). His changed circumstances are cause for comment in the underworld: the doctor Pepagomenos asks him how he got into this state—“so shabby, limping, pale, weakened by exposure? What made you a pauper and a beggar, disreputable and disrespectable?” (34.31–36.4; cf. 62.17). And Mazaris makes it clear that at the time of writing he was still being denounced by the emperor as an example for others to avoid (40.16–21).

This is the rather problematic picture given of “Mazaris” in the text; the question of the identity of Mazaris himself now has to be seriously considered: have scholars been naive in the past to equate the author of the piece and the narrator? It has been customary to accept this literary persona of Mazaris at face value, but the possibility of the narrator being a fiction has at least to be considered, even though the *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit* takes literally all the characters mentioned and their biographical details as recorded in *Mazaris’s Journey*. The suggestion was first properly made by Baldwin that Mazaris may have been a pseudonym given to the narrator, “chosen for its relative rarity and its punning possibilities,” for Mazaris is twice (24.31, 26.15) called Meizares, “take too much,” presumably an insult referring to his greed. Baldwin, however, does not follow up on the implications of the pseudonymity of the work.²³

With regard to the identity and characterization of “Mazaris” in the text, the piece’s inconsistencies and improbabilities have been generally ignored because of the low opinion held of the work itself. We certainly need not take the guise of the poor outcast, begging for gifts or recognition, seriously: it was a common literary persona in late Byzantium, often adopted by officials or friends of the emperor. Indeed fictional humorous narrative was well known in Byzantium. The twelfth-century Ptochoprodromic poems are an excellent example. Once taken as a literal account of scholarly vicissitudes in Constantinople, despite the inconsistencies involved in the depictions of the narrator, they are clearly genre exercises, and their supposed author no more than a series of consciously adopted literary personae. The poems feature a henpecked husband, a downtrodden monk, and a poverty-stricken scholar, each complaining of his lot in life, and were obviously intended for presentation at court, perhaps

23 Baldwin, “Reflections and Reappraisal,” 349; at note 35 he suggests a further pun on the term *μαζήρεος*, “bastard.”

by the author, perhaps by a professional *récitateur*, for the entertainment of the emperor and courtiers.

In terms greatly reminiscent of the Ptochoprodromic poems, Gregory Antiochos, though a high-ranking bureaucrat and imperial secretary in the twelfth century, bemoaned his poverty and destitution and his inability to feed and care properly for his children and aged father. He is of course employing a typical topos of “complaint literature,” failure to acquire a living wage and appropriate living conditions, which should warn us against taking his own account and those of other “starving scholars” too literally.²⁴ The fourteenth-century poet Manuel Philes even pointed out, when requesting aid from the emperor Andronikos, that his threadbare “chiton” had fallen to pieces and that he had worn out his “nobly shorn lion’s skin” by having to wrap himself up with it in the winter.²⁵ Furthermore Mazaris suffers too much: not only has he undergone disgrace and the permanent loss of the emperor’s good opinion (he is still held up to obloquy as the archetypal offender: 40.19–21), but he has gout and is crippled; he is poor; he has lost his children; he has no means of livelihood; and he has a demanding and importunate wife. All of these are favorite topoi in complaint and begging literature, which was often the production of well-known scholars and officials.

One of the catalysts for the disgrace of Mazaris, as it is presented, appears to have been his remaining on Lemnos, while other colleagues (notably Karantzes, Tarchaniotes, and Machetaris) followed John VII, whom Manuel had banished to Lemnos after his return from the West, in his attempt on Thessalonike in 1403. They were later treated with favor, probably once John was installed as ruler of Thessalonike. Mazaris, in contrast, was apparently accused of embezzlement and disgraced (36.14–29). But Mazaris explicitly contradicts himself: first, despite his utter disgrace and banishment, he is still clearly at court, where his narration is being presented for the benefit of the courtiers (4.10–11). Indeed, on several occasions (6.20–23, 44.9–13, 46.11–14, 50.12–16, 52.8–10, 60.10–16) he is considered by both Holobolos and the rest of the dead as an expert source on what is currently happening in the bureaucracy. He can also function as a conduit of information back to the imperial court—Padiates tells

24 G. L. F. Tafel, ed., *Eustathii Opuscula: Accedunt Trapezuntinae historiae scriptores...* (Frankfurt, 1932), 311; J. Darrouzès, “Deux lettres de Grégoire Antiochos écrites de Bulgarie vers 1173,” *BSI* 23 (1962): 276–84, 24 (1963): 65–86; A. Kazhdan (in collaboration with Simon Franklin), *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and*

Twelfth Centuries (Cambridge, 1984), 196–206, 219–20, cf. 252–53.

25 For the text, see E. A. Fisher, *Planudes' Greek Translation of Ovid's Metamorphoses* (New York, 1990), 57; cf. E. Miller, ed., *Manuelis Philae Carmina: Ex codicibus Escorialensibus...* (Paris, 1857), 2: 137 (no. 73).

Holobolos to beg Mazaris *not* to pass on Holobolos's remarks to the inmates of the imperial palace (26.15–16). Certainly Mazaris's "advice" on the unsoundness of Skaranos (46.26–48.28) comes from a figure who clearly knows what is going on behind the scenes and has an interest in making his views known.

The second contradiction involves the dedication to the despot, in which the narrator says he has been hospitably entertained by Theodore II, despot of Morea. In the narrative, however, he describes himself as poor and destitute during his stay in the Peloponnese (64.8–10, 23–25). It could be the case that he was down-and-out on his arrival, and that Theodore has since financially supported him, but the wording of the dedication is interesting—"such indeed has been the munificence you have shown me during a continuous contact, such the understanding and condescendence (condescension?) that you have brought to our hourly companionship. . . ." (98.2–4). Despite allowing for considerable rhetorical exaggeration by a grateful recipient of financial favors, this sounds as if he had been an honored guest. Furthermore, if he had been totally disgraced in the eyes of Manuel II, it is highly unlikely that he would have been acceptable as a guest at the court of the emperor's son—especially at the time when the emperor himself was resident there. The picture of an author/narrator Mazaris, who has lost his official position and is in disgrace—indeed has been labeled as a example of misconduct to others—must be rejected. Finally, if we consider that this piece may have been written for presentation to a court audience, which included the emperor, the anomalies become ludicrously unacceptable.

Holobolos and the Other Protagonists

The central character in the work, however, is not Mazaris himself, but his friend and colleague Holobolos. If we take Mazaris to be an ego-narrative device, a "fictional" character, where does that leave Holobolos, his rascally colleague in the underworld? Do we accept the account of his career, or is he too a literary creation—an archetypal bureaucrat? The fact that a Manuel Holobolos is addressed in a letter by Joseph Bryennios, perhaps written in 1408, need not compel the assumption that this Holobolos is the same person.²⁶ The letter contains no mention of Holobolos's connection with the court—

²⁶ M. Treu, "Mazaris und Holobolos," *BZ* 1 (1892): 93–95, publishes the letter from which it is clear that this Holobolos is in Thessalonike; it may have been written in late 1408 or early 1409 when Manuel was in Thessalonike to install his son Andronikos as despot (Barry et al., *Mazaris' Journey*, xvii;

PLP 21046; Barker, *Manuel II Paleologus*, 275 with n. 132, 279–80 [above, n. 4]). A contemporary of Manuel Holobolos, a John Holobolos, was deacon and Great Chartophylax of St. Sophia: *MM* 2: 292, 304, 348, 372.

he is simply addressed as physician, rhetor, and philosopher (though the mention of Holobolos as a physician could suggest a connection with the Holobolos, as amateur doctor, of *Mazaris's Journey*). Indeed, the name could simply have been chosen in the context of *Mazaris's Journey* as a suitable one on which to pun—the character is often termed Holobodos, “whole-beef,” by Padiates (24.30, 26.24, 28.32, 30.7, 22, 32.20). It is also a possibility that the name may have been deliberately selected to recall the bureaucrat Manuel Holobolos who fell from grace under Michael VIII in both 1261 and 1273.

In *Mazaris's Journey* Holobolos, the emperor's secretary, is described as holding an important position at court from at least 1395 until, it appears, his recent death, presumably in late 1413 or very early 1414, perhaps at the same time as Mazaris's own “demise.” Holobolos seems to have been appointed to his influential position during Manuel's journey to the West in 1399–1402 (12.20–2, 32.7–8, cf. 62.5–7), and to have lost the emperor's favor shortly afterward (18.32–20.1). However, at his death, he is said to still have chrysobulls and decrees in his possession (22.15–16), and Mazaris speaks of the emperor having recently (ἐναγχοῦς) granted Holobolos resplendent robes of white silk (10.20–22). To make sense of this, we have to assume that, though disgraced and forced to endure a rival, Holobolos presumably remained in office.

Like all the dead, Holobolos is naked and is described as “black-bottomed,” that is, virile and a formidable opponent (6.16; cf. 68.5).²⁷ He has a large, hooked nose, cropped hair, and a full beard, epitomizing all the faults of the public servant—ambitious, paranoid, jealous, and self-seeking—and he is introduced as “all covered with whip-marks” that represent his sins (cf. Lucian, *Kataplous*, 28–29). Typically, his first concern is to learn all the details about which of his former associates still continued in favor at court (6.11–13, 15–23). He was not of an established family: we are informed in the course of the dialogue that he rose from low origins through the hierarchy (his father was a wine merchant: 28.11, cf. 28.32–30.3), that he sailed with Manuel to Britain and France and “as far as the Ocean” (12.21), and that while in Italy with Manuel II he was promoted to the rank of the emperor's sole and permanent secretary for public and confidential affairs (32.7–8: ἵν' ἐς αἰὲν τυγχάνω δῆπουθεν εὕρισκόμενος μονώτατος γραμματεὺς ῥητῶν τε καὶ ἀπορρήτων). Oikonomides has suggested that, when Mazaris speaks of him as the emperor's *grammateus* or personal secretary, he means the *protonotarios*, or chief of the notaries, whose role it was to register transactions and prepare documents. *Protonotarioi* took part in imperial processions and by the fourteenth or fifteenth century it appears that they could certify state treaties. The *protonotarios* was fifty-seventh in importance in

27 The term, used by Aristophanes to describe Herakles (*Lysistrata* 802), was proverbial (Herodotos 7.216).

the secular hierarchy, immediately after the *orphanotrophos*, according to the fourteenth-century *De ceremoniis* of Pseudo-Kodinos: his uniform was identical to that of the orphanotrophos and his duties secretarial: δῆλος καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὀνόματος· πρῶτος γὰρ τῶν νοταρίων ἦτοι τῶν γραμματικῶν.²⁸

Had it not been for his own misconduct in office hours, Holobolos says, he expected to become grand logothete (12.26–28, cf. 10.14–16), the co-ordinator of the whole imperial administration and, indeed, this was perfectly possible for a parvenu, in view of the career of Nikephoros Choumnos, who had done the same from obscure origins in the fourteenth century.²⁹ Holobolos states that at his disgrace he was on the point of marrying a woman of rank and had been constructing splendid mansions (14.6–10).³⁰ He also reveals that in one trip to the Peloponnese with the emperor Manuel he made a fortune—700 gold staters—practically overnight as an expression of appreciation of the decrees, edicts, and chrysobulls that he issued (66.23–25), and he is clearly skilled in the composition and layout of imperial documents (22.15–18, 24.1–4, cf. 20.8–10, 30.13–17). His constant absences from the office, however, while engaged in an affair with a nun (20.1–12, 30.7–21), led to the appointment of Philommates, and the aggravation of having this rival promoted, and his inability, despite all his contacts, to have him banished from court, caused his depression and eventual death: even in Hades he is suffering permanent misery at the thought of Philommates' promotion (22.2–3).

Mazaris's Journey has a very contemporary flavor, concerned with officials in power in the years 1414 and 1415, together with their fathers in the underworld who died recently enough to be well remembered at court. Yet Holobolos implies that his disgrace, if not his death, came in or shortly after 1402 (18.32–20.1), the time of the emperor's return from the West and the downfall of that "despicable satrap" (the sultan Bayezid), though he did remain in office. As a modern politician (the British prime minister, Harold Wilson) once commented,

28 J. Verpeaux, ed., *Pseudo-Kodinos. Traité des Offices* (Paris, 1966), 139, 185; N. Oikonomides, "La chancellerie impériale de Byzance du XIIIe au XVe siècle," *REB* 43 (1985): 170–72; cf. R. Guillard, "Les logothètes," *REB* 29 (1971): 38–40.

29 A. Laiou, "The Byzantine Aristocracy in the Palaeologan Period: A Story of Arrested Development," *Viator* 4 (1973): 139: "The first half of the fourteenth century yields some examples of imperial civil servants who brought their families from relative obscurity to social success." For the

fabulous wealth of Theodoros Metochites, including his houses and a palatial mansion with marble floors, see I. Ševčenko, "Society and Intellectual Life in the Fourteenth Century," in *Actes du XIVe Congrès International des Études Byzantines*, ed. M. Berza and E. Stănescu (Bucharest, 1974), 90; L. Schopen, ed., *Nicephori Gregorae Byzantina historia* (Bonn, 1829–55), 1: 425–26.

30 For house prices, see A. Kazhdan, "The Italian and Late Byzantine City," *DOP* 49 (1995): 10–11: it was not unusual

for aristocrats to own ten houses in the capital at prices from 50 to 250 hyperpyra. Prices for a single house could go as high as 600 hyperpyra or more: see J.-C. Cheynet et al., "Prix et salaires à Byzance (X–XVe siècle)," in C. Abadie-Reynal et al., *Hommes et richesses dans l'Empire byzantin* (Paris, 1991), 2: 339–74, esp. 353–56; for salaries see *ibid.*, 370–74: in the late fourteenth century, a doctor's salary could be as high as 250 hyperpyra, an interpreter's 100 hyperpyra.

"A year is a long time in politics." It seems inconceivable that anyone's foibles and misdeeds could have been remembered for twelve years, and in such detail that they were able to form the nucleus of a topical political satire at this later date, especially because Holobolos did not after all reach the top rungs of the bureaucratic ladder. Furthermore, if Holobolos were a real official, now deceased, there is a distinct lack of factual details, of specifics, given in the account of his career—we hear of his trip to the West in the retinue of Manuel II more than twelve years previously (12.20–21), and of his "white imperial robes" (10.20, 30.2), but not of any actual titles or dignities that he held: even his possible rank of protonotarios has to be postulated.

But it is inconceivable that Holobolos, in his boasting of his successes, would not have mentioned his laboriously acquired dignities. Furthermore it appears that he had "recently" been given the robes of white silk (10.20–22, cf. 30.1–2, 38.20–21), which contradicts Holobolos's own statement of his disgrace shortly after 1402, of which Mazaris seems totally unaware, though he would certainly have known of it as the expert on all matters pertaining to the court hierarchy. Indeed he would indubitably have been aware of the details of the past career of the emperor's permanent secretary (32.4–8), who had been expected to become grand logothete (10.14–16, 12.26–28), tenth in pseudo-Kodinos's court ranking (137.8). All the evidence, in fact, suggests that Holobolos's career, if not Holobolos himself, is as fictional as Mazaris's and that we should beware of taking this text literally as an historical and prosopographical source.³¹

Like Holobolos, his mentor Padiates cannot be specifically identified (though several persons of that name are known from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries).³² He was clearly affluent—he mentions having to leave his family, houses, and wealth—and of the highest rank at court, having served with Manuel in Constantinople, Thessalonike, Anatolia, Lemnos, and "everywhere" (28.26–31). Holobolos had apparently replaced him prior to Manuel's journey to the West, and the zenith of his career should thus be dated to the 1380s and early 1390s if this can be taken at face value. He is characterized as a man of violence and invective, as well as two-faced—accustomed to say one thing to His Majesty and put another in writing for a consideration—while Holobolos says of him that he was incapable of sincere friendship, but was everybody's friend for the purposes of favor

31 Barker, *Manuel II Paleologus*, 170 n. 81, warned that "much of the prosopographical material in this text is undoubtedly well-founded; but in view of the scurrilous nature of many of these references . . . at least some caution must be exercised in

handling them." A further minor inconsistency is that according to Holobolos himself, he gained his experience in the service by being dictated to for four years on end by a hypocritical windbag—his former boss Padiates (24.18–20). But later in the

work, Mazaris and Padiates agree that Holobolos was not Padiates' undersecretary but a rival appointment, though Holobolos refuses to admit it (32.16–18).

32 *PLP* 21289; Treu, "Mazaris und Holobolos," 93 (above, n. 9).

and deceit (24.17–18, 28.17–18). Padiates' talent for abuse is borne out in the text: according to Holobolos, when in office Padiates used to behave "more like a clown than a serious official, with endless insults, abuse and mockery against everyone, man and woman alike" (26.19–21).³³ Even more than the other protagonists, he is given not only to polysyllabic insults but to violence: in one instance he is reported to have hit the noble Droungarios from Trebizond on the head right in the middle of the market place, and he physically attacks Holobolos with his sturdy staff, which is variously described as a club or a stick used for support, causing (in Homeric language) Holobolos's brain to pour down his nostrils (32.12–15, 34.18–21, cf. 24.28–29).

As with Holobolos, there is a distinct lack of specificity about Padiates' career, except that he was supposedly demoted in favor of Holobolos prior to 1399 and from having been "cherished and deserving" was considered "worthless and contemptible" (24.25–26). If his abrasive nature was remembered more than fifteen years after the zenith of his career, he must have been a highly memorable member of the bureaucracy (in which case we would perhaps expect to be more enlightened in the text regarding the details of his position). It is more reasonable to suspect either that, like Holobolos and Mazaris, he is a fictional character, or that his career is unlikely to have been exactly as represented in *Mazaris's Journey*.

Just as Holobolos and Mazaris himself, as depicted in the *Journey to Hades*, are clearly shown as close to the center of power in the huge palace-based Constantinopolitan administration,³⁴ so the other characters vilified in the narration are from the highest echelon of courtiers, with Padiates and Philommates described as having held the most confidential of offices. Several of the characters in *Mazaris's Journey* are mentioned in the correspondence of Manuel II, which confirms their high rank. "Asan," the emperor's relative, and the orator Potamios were addressees of the emperor Manuel, while two others, Skaranos (Mouskaranos) and Antiochos, are mentioned in his

33 Another courtier, an orator who is said to have specialized in invective, both in speech and writing, is the "old dotard Potamios" (44.7–8): born c. 1340, he is one of Manuel's addressees (*Ep.* 47); some letters of his survive (G. T. Dennis, ed., *The Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus* [Washington, D.C., 1977], 224–27; *PLP* 23601).

34 According to the *ODB* 1: 338–40, s.v. "Bureaucracy," by the tenth century there were fifty-nine main and about five hundred subaltern offices. The emperor was regarded as the head of the whole administration,

though with the Komnenoi the logothete *tôn sekrêtôn* (or *megas logothetes*) became the coordinator of the administration. A. P. Kazhdan and M. McCormick, "The Social World of the Byzantine Court," in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. H. Maguire (Washington D.C., 1997), 175–76, estimate that the Byzantine male courtiers, prior to 1204, numbered somewhat less than 2,000 persons.

letters.³⁵ According to *Mazaris's Journey*, the sleep-loving Antiochos is said to have been part of Manuel's retinue on his four-year trip to western Europe in 1399–1402 (42.1), like two parenthetical characters, Aspietaos and Staphidakes, who fell out with each other over florins seized dishonestly in France (46.3–5). This work, therefore, purports to give a picture of the top echelons of an imperial civil service, staffed by brilliant but ambitious and self-serving professionals, who make vast fortunes from their prestigious positions and who suffer from permanent paranoia with regard to their relative status, wealth, and importance.³⁶

At this point, we should inquire whether this picture is intended to be realistic. In the invective directed against these high-ranking courtiers, the points of attack are primarily work-based, as befits ambitious competitors in the public service, and concern activities in and out of office, with sexual misconduct during office hours a favorite theme. Of the courtiers satirized, three are described as sex-obsessed and their sexual proclivities made a point of relatively detailed reference, while five subsidiary characters are called cuckolds, adulterers, or homosexuals. It is in this context that most of the enthusiastic invective, itself largely featuring citations from Aristophanes, is found.³⁷

Holobolos himself, we are informed, lost his job because of his infatuation with an old flame, now a nun (20.5–10). Whenever the emperor requested his presence he was not at his post but romping with his lover, described later in the work as Sister Frivolity or Chief Empty-head (τῇ Μείζονι τοῦ ματαίου: 30.19–20, 30). Her name, therefore, as the editors suggest, was possibly Meizomatissa (one of the aristocratic Meizomatis family). Holobolos admits the affair and that he had spent day and night in the bed of this wanton lady, the lover of a

35 *The Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus*, *Epp.* 18, 30, 47, cf. 20; *PLP* 1503, 23601, 26035, 1038. For Antiochos, see *Ep.* 44.13–18 (quoted below); from the reference to Kakoalexios, “Alexios the Varmint,” as Antiochos’s son (*Mazaris's Journey*, 42.24–25 [above, n. 3]), Antiochos appears to have been Holobolos’s brother-in-law (Dennis, *Letters*, 55). Barker (*Manuel II Paleologus*, 405 n. 15 [above, n. 3]) suggests that Antiochos may have been *parakoimomenos*, in that he is referred to as ὁ Ἀντίοχος ὁ παρ’ ἡμῶν by Manuel. Skaranos is mentioned by Manuel, in *Ep.* 49.8–15 (“Skaranos, now, has a good mind and has good experience in those tasks he has been assigned to do. . . . He is our financial official (λογιστής) and is well aware of our straits”); he appears to have been a relative of Manuel Chrysoloras, the addressee (*PLP* 26035).

36 Aspietaos: *PLP* 1568; Staphidakes: *PLP* 26733. Note, for example, Holobolos’s advice to Mazaris about retrieving his fortunes: “You will find it easy to win the respect of the Peloponnesians, a position of honor will come to you quite naturally, and you should be able to make a tidy fortune on the side” (8.11–13).

37 It would be unwise to take this picture of the public service as a hotbed of immorality too literally, though we should note the affairs of the emperor Manuel himself prior to his marriage: for Manuel’s illegitimate children, see V. Grecu, ed., *Georgios Sphrantzes, Memorii 1401–1477; cronica 1258–1481* (Bucharest, 1966), 3.1026A, who mentions a son and two daughters who were buried at Monemvasia, clearly born prior to the marriage to Helena (Dragash) in

1392. For his legitimate children, see Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus*, 99, 474–76, 494–96 (above, n. 3). Manuel’s *Dialogue with His Mother* contains the interesting comment: “I believe you recall, Mother, how you used to praise the bond of marriage, whilst sometimes I took the opposite line. . . . To tell the truth, being a bachelor was a bit of a storm; only being married has not been a calm either” (*Manuel Palaiologos, Dialogue with the Empress-Mother on Marriage*, trans. A. Angelou [Vienna, 1991], 70).

thousand men (20.7–8, cf. 30.18–20; κεκοισυρωμένη: cf. Aristophanes, *Clouds* 48). He is twice termed ῥεραφανιδωμένος, “sodomized with a radish,” a punishment for Athenian men caught in adultery, according to Aristophanes.³⁸ His boss Padiates had also been engaged in an adulterous relationship and is called “defiler of another man’s bed” by Holobolos in return (60.9–10, cf. 28.16–17). Padiates’ son, moreover, is a bastard—and his parentage is given, his father being named as Rhiphas Chalkeopoulos (34.16–17).³⁹

Furthermore, as soon as the elderly Antiochos sees Mazaris, he asks him about his aristocratic love, whose arrival in Hades he is impatiently awaiting. The emperor having previously forbidden their marriage, he intends to marry her as soon as she arrives in the underworld, and he has been thinking of her continuously—in France, Britain, and everywhere, even in Hades (40.31–42.7). Like Holobolos’s mistress, she is described in terms reminiscent of Strepsiades’ aristocratic wife in Aristophanes’ *Clouds* (53, 48), as a lady who squanders her money and her charms freely (σπαθῶσάν τε καὶ κεκοισυρωμένην), and both the lady’s name, Anatolike (ἄντικρυς ὡς ἐξ ἀνατολῆς λάμπουσιν Ἀνατολικήν), her son’s, and her place of residence (near the gate of St. Romanos) are given (42.10–11, 13). Mazaris gleefully tells the enamored Antiochos (γυναικοφρενόληπτε: 42.8; γυναικομανής: 40.30, 42.14; ἔρωτομανής: 42.18) that her beauty has now faded, and all her wealth been squandered by her foolish son Anatolios (42.14–17).

And so the upper echelons of the imperial civil service are portrayed as a hotbed of vice and immorality. Further bureaucrats are called cuckolds⁴⁰ or described as keeping mistresses (*pallakai* or *hetairai*). Mouskaranos (probably Demetrios Skaranos, a correspondent of Manuel II), the auditor, is called, like Holobolos, a convicted adulterer (ῥεραφανιδωμένος) among a barrage of other insults (48.23–24), while the “old dotard” Potamios asks whether Charsianites still keeps a mistress and drinks his wine without water (44.12–13). The long-standing Scythian mistress of Leskaris, the eldest son of Lampadarios (concertmaster), the imperial choir-master and composer, is presumably, like Anatolike, identifiable: certainly she is said to appear widely in public with him, and Leskaris comes in for much invective from his own father for not having given up his mistress despite having

38 Cf. *Mazaris’s Journey*, 24.29, 28.31, 68.5; *PLP* 17620. The term “found-out adulterer,” as translated by the editors, is ῥεραφανιδωμένε, a favorite term of “Mazaris” (24.29, 28.31, 48.23–24); see Ar., *Clouds* 1083 (cf. *Plout.* 168, Lucian, *Peregr.* 9) for this punishment for adulterers in Athens.

39 Holobolos says (34.1–9) that Padiates’ reason for going to Lemnos was that he was terrified that the heartbroken cuckold (Malakenos) who shared the use of his wife with Padiates would return from the pits of Thessalonike and make him walk up those seventy-two steps of the Patriarch’s Palace, with which adulterous wives threatened their husbands.

40 The term cuckold (κερασφόρος) is used of Karantzes (36.17); both Karantzes (36.27) and Malakenos (34.3) are described as “κερουλκῶ τετρωμένον βέλει,” literally, “wounded with an arrow tipped with horn,” the adjective being an allusion to Eur., *Or.* 268; *PLP* 1117, 16446.

become a monk at the monastery of Evergetis. She is described as that utter harlot (διεσπεκλωμένην: cf. *Ploutos* 1082) from the land of the Scythians, a stinking old hag with whom he has rolled in the hay since boyhood. He has been seen with her in the marketplace, festivals, crossroads, and public feasts, and is more like a pig that comes grunting after her than her escort (50.20–24, 52.25–26). Mazaris confirms Lampadarios’s account. Lampadarios is unfortunate in his sons: the younger, “Puff-jaw” (Φυσίγναθος), associates with a sexually ambivalent crowd of dissipated youths and prefers to perform frivolous songs and obscene dances at street corners and in brothels rather than act as Domestikos of the Reverend Imperial Clergy and of the Great Church and sing the glorious hymns of the holy liturgy and Lampadarios’s own compositions (50.27–52.3, 52.27–54.12; for Mazaris’s parody of these, see 50.9–10). And both the “ass-sticker” Pegonites, τοῦ πυγὴν νύττοντος Πηγωνίτου, and the auditor Mouskaranos are labeled homosexuals (38.16, 46.28).⁴¹

It is in these references to lechers, adulterers, and cuckolds that the scurrility and obscenity in this text, which have so often been noted, feature most frequently. We should note that Aristophanic language and allusions are often used to contextualize the invective—allusions to the standard Aristophanic curriculum, which would surely have been identified by an educated audience and which was reflected in other late Byzantine satire, such as the fifteenth-century *Skatablattas*. Much of the invective, too, is obviously intended to have a specific point of attack, even if the modern reader is unable to perceive the target or allusion. Rarely are insults merely strung together. Padiates, it is true, who is said to have specialized in invective both in life and in the underworld, insults Holobolos with μῶρε καὶ παράληρε καὶ ῥεραφανιδωμένε Ὀλόβοδε (you driveling fool, and idiot, “All-beef,” who has been sodomized with a radish: 24.29–30, 26.19–21), while Holobolos retaliates with ἐπάρατον καὶ παλαμναῖον καὶ ὑβριστήν, τὸν ἀλλοτρίαν μίαναντα εὐνήν (damned, cursed, offensive individual who soiled another man’s bed: 28.16–17).

In general, however, the insults often make an attempt at characterization or at passing social or professional judgments. Padiates is twice called a windbag, φλήναφος, by Holobolos (12.10, 24.16), and so he is (cf. 26.11–12, 18–21). Mazaris is generally called clubfoot, or limping, κυλλοποδίων, a reference to his gout and his past luxurious lifestyle (24.30, 36.1, 68.8). In similar fashion, Padiates appears to be suffering from gout (30.28–29, 32.25, 34.1), as is one of the local barons in the Peloponnese (70.19–20, 72.5–6).⁴² Insults addressed to former and current colleagues are often intended as physically descriptive: Holobolos’s assistants included the rumpless (mouse-tailed) and headless Kassianos, the pockmarked Manikaitaos,

⁴¹ For Pegonites, see *PLP* 23150. In MS P he is called Πυγωνίτης, a name that cries out for paronomasia.

⁴² In return for Holobolos’s advice, Mazaris “promises” never to treat anyone for gout in this world or the next (66.9–10).

and the walking corpse Okimos, while currently in office are the dark cuckold Karantzes, the sooty-faced Tarchaniotes, and Machetaris with the lead-and-copper complexion (30.32, 32.1–3, 36.27–29). There are also anecdotal asides about colleagues using hair-removers (44.11), dyeing their beard and hair black with raven's eggs (44.15–16; doubtless an early prototype of “Grecian 2000”), and wearing white imperial robes even in their dreams (38.20–21). Sir Matthew Chrysokephalos, logothete of Manuel in 1399–1402, is so wedded to astrology that he won't even go to the toilet without checking the position of the stars with an astrolabe (38.18–20)—and, despite this last, there is considerably less scatological reference or lavatory humor than might have been expected from such an enthusiastic imitator of Aristophanes, though bottoms receive frequent mention: after all, the inhabitants of the underworld are all naked.⁴³ Presumably we have to assume that all these targets were well known and that, through these attacks on their personal characteristics, they could have been clearly identified by their colleagues in the audience.

Mazaris's Journey also possesses a clear subtext of satire against doctors, particularly amateur ones, abuse of doctors being a favorite topos in later Byzantine literature (though not Lucianic), which enjoyed satirizing the iniquities of the medical profession. The usual term for them in the *Journey to Hades* is that of “banes to mankind” (βροτολοιγοί: cf. *Iliad* 5.31 of Ares).⁴⁴ Medicine was obviously part of the normal curriculum, and Holobolos himself was a doctor, “the capital's clever orator and ablest of physicians” (according to his friend Mazaris), and it was his medical as well as his other talents that gained him initial employment at court.⁴⁵ In fact he criticizes practitioners for not even knowing the Greek alphabet and being ignorant of both Galen and Hippocrates, killing many patients by their haphazard treatment (10.34–12.3). Mazaris, too, seems to have been accustomed to practice medicine (66.9–10). We also meet the physician Pepagomenos, who once administered a poisonous drug to himself by mistake, and Phokidios (Eumarantos's drunken assistant secretary) (34.25–30). Pepagomenos's elder son, too, is classed as one of these menaces, who include Onokentios (a sad case of brain damage), his brother Libistros, Peter the scourge of Pentapolis, the

⁴³ Holobolos is “black-bottomed” and “big-bottomed” (6.16, 68.5); cf. the “ass-sticker” Pegonites (38.16). All the dead show off their genital regions (60.13) (ἀπεψολωμένοι, literally “to retract the foreskin,” reflects Ar., *Ach.* 592. LSJ⁹ 229 coyly translates ἀποψωλέω into Latin as “praeputium retrahere alicui”); ῥεραφανιδωμένοι: 24.29, 28.31, 48.23–24.

For references to lavatories, see 40.28–29 (Antiochos), 56.15–16 (Holobolos tells Mazaris to pretend to relieve himself and then hurry home); for an obscenity, see the double entendre on συνουσία, “intercourse,” at 28.21.

⁴⁴ See *Mazaris's Journey*, 4.23, 22.14, 38.24, 66.7–8, 76.5; cf. 8.29–30, 38.29–30 (above, n. 5).

⁴⁵ *Mazaris's Journey*, 10.14, 12.5, 8; 94.12: at 94.13–14 Malakes accuses Holobolos of having been induced by greed to practice medicine on the side in the upper world.

hellhound Konones who administers hemlock for medicine (Κωνώνη, τοῦ κώνειον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις παρεχομένου), and Charsianites, who helps his serious cases along on their way to Charon (38.23–30). When in the Peloponnese, Mazaris also swears by Chalazas from Thessalonike, “that menace to his patients” (66.7–8), while Holobolos suggests to Mazaris, as an alternative to starving, that he can go to Crete or Kephallonia and become a tutor or a killer like Lord Chaliboures of the Doukas family who is resident in Sparta (76.4–7).

Doctors, especially amateur practitioners, are attacked throughout the work with a vigor reminiscent of twelfth-century Byzantium and earlier,⁴⁶ and according to *Mazaris’s Journey* they obviously hold places in the bureaucracy as respected and wealthy members of the court: in fact Holobolos ridicules the doctor Malakes for remembering amid the discomforts of the Peloponnese his former creature comforts—children, houses, lands, trees, fruits, profits, sweet wine, luxuries, fish, wealth, meat, entertainments, the company of the best men, and other comforts and pleasures (including his buried gold, contributions from the hospitals, and profits he made out of the Galata officials). Malakes expects employment in the underworld and inquires of Holobolos whether an orator or doctor has more prestige in the underworld, asking him to “keep a place open for me in accordance with my rank” (92.3–7, 18–24, 96.3).

The greater part of the “insults” in *Mazaris’s Journey* consists of typically Byzantine puns or alliterative plays on words. A love of paronomasia abounds through the work. One has but to note τριβολαῖε, μᾶλλον δὲ τριοβολιμαῖε (you bunch of thistles, you three-obol specimen) as Padiates calls Holobolos (32.19–20; cf. 48.8–9 for Skaranos). There is, for example, the scarlet shark Charsianites, a doctor (τοῦ κοκκίνου χαρχαρόδοντος Χαρσιανίτου: 44.11–12), and Aspietaos, whose talk is pleasant but who acts like a biting adder (ὡς ἀσπὶς βύων τὰ ὦτα, ἐκεῖνος ὁ Ἀσπιέταος ὥσπερ ἀσπὶς δάκνυων: 44.30–31) as well as “asophos” Sophianos (46.25), the “shriveled raisin” Staphidakes (ἀσταφὶς Σταφιδάκης 46.5), and Melgouzes the “former milker of goats” (ὁ τὰς αἰγὰς πρότερον Μελγουζῆς ἀμέλγων)—the joke is enhanced by his arriving from the Milky Way (ἐκ γαλαξίου πόλου: 44.4–5). Holobolos frequently becomes “Holobodos” (Ὀλόβοδος, “whole beef”); while Mazaris “Meizaris” (Μειζάρης, “take-too-much,” is perhaps a reference to his gouty condition or, as mentioned above,

⁴⁶ For example, in the *Timarion* (*Timarione, pseudo-Luciano*, ed. R. Romano [Naples, 1974], 11–12, 34–41), and by the “Δήμιος ἡ Ἱατρός” of Theodore Prodromos (G. Podesta, “Le Satire Lucianesche di Teodoro Prodromo,” *Aevum* 21 [1947]: 12–25;

and see A. Kazhdan, “The Image of the Medical Doctor in Byzantine Literature of the Tenth to Twelfth Centuries,” *DOP* 38 [1984]: 43–51; B. Baldwin, “Beyond the House Call: Doctors in Early Byzantine History and Politics,” *DOP* [1984]: 15–19).

his greed, as well as to the luxurious living standards of bureaucrats in general); and Padiates “Bandiates” (Μπαντιάτης, “bandit”). The four top-ranking judges, the καθολικοί κριταί, are glossed as “Winesweller” (Οινοφάγος), “Trouble Galore” (τὸν Μόγων μεστόν), “Crooks’ Haven” (τὸν Ἀγκυραν ἀδικούντων) and “Swindlershelp” (Σκαιῶν φύλακα), while the monks of the Xanthopoulon monastery become the Ξανθοὺς ὑπούλους, or “Fraudulent Friars.”⁴⁷ In view of the eternal popularity of puns and plays on words in Byzantium, these jokes were well within a long-standing Aristophanic and Byzantine tradition and clearly were popular with their audience or readership.

Only in two cases does the attack seem to have a serious political agenda. Significantly, invective in this work really comes into play when we meet an internal auditor (46.27–48.9). Mazaris reports to the father of one of his old colleagues in the salt taxation department, Bartholomew de Alagaskos, presumably a member of the Italian de Langosco family, that his son will have to face an audit of the salt accounts: salt was of course an important item of revenue, and Alexios Apokaukos made a fortune as manager of the state’s salt pans.⁴⁸ This state auditor, who had previously, it is said, stood trial over the matter of the “imperial timber that was shipped to Alexandria,” is described as that “mangy creature Misael Mouskaranos, that backbiting, thievish, despicable, underhanded bugger and pickpocket, who thinks he knows everything past, present and future, but apart from a lot of impudence he’s just nothing at all—that phony astrologer, who can’t speak Greek properly and has papist leanings—a man who is circumcised. . . . Are you seriously telling me that this abominable, debauched, crazy schizophrenic wants to call my dear son to account?” (46.27–48.7).

Mazaris replies: “Yes, that’s the one I mean, that obnoxious weed, that two-bit character” (48.9).⁴⁹ There seems to be an obvious subtext here. Skaranos appears from the emperor Manuel’s own letters

⁴⁷ *Mazaris’s Journey*, 18.29–32, 20.23, 92.11–12; Theocharides, “Τέσσαρες Βυζαντινοὶ καθολικοὶ κριταί,” 497–98, decodes these judges as Phakrases, Gemistos Plethon, the metropolitan of Ankyra, and the skeuophylax of St. Sophia. Baldwin (“Reflections and Reappraisal,” 353 [above, n. 1]) suggests that Gemistos is unsuitable, as having been exiled to Mistra in 1410, but see n. 69 below.

⁴⁸ “Salt,” *ODB* 3: 1832–33; L. Schopen, ed., *Ioannis Cantacuzeni eximperatoris historiarum libri quattuor* (Bonn, 1828–32), 1. 118.3–5. Baldwin (“Reflections and

Reappraisal,” 351) cites Manuel II, *Ep.* 8.6–7 (above, n. 33) on Neokaisarites, who lost his position in charge of the salt works. To Bartholomeos de Alagaskos (*PLP* 20748) working in salt administration is considerably preferable to working as an interpreter between Latins and Greeks (46.13–14).

⁴⁹ For circumcision, see 44.23. Dennis, *Letters*, 59, translates the passage: “that mangy Misael Mouskaranos, that slanderer, that despicable thief, that lewd sneak and pickpocket, who thinks he knows everything . . . that stargazer who cannot

speak Greek properly, that Latin sympathizer, that circumcised one, who has been unfaithful both to the Triune God and to the emperor, whose friendship toward all others is not genuine, but mercenary, deceitful, and cheating. Are you telling me that this absolutely abominable debauched, delirious madman wants to call my dearest son to account?”

(*Ep.* 49.8–14) to have been an adviser and trusted servant of Manuel, and to have been in charge of the payroll office, as treasurer or λογιστής.⁵⁰ He was also obviously an ex-Jew and a Catholic and Latin sympathizer, and it is not surprising that he was unpopular. Alagaskos requests Mazaris to take back secretly to the emperor the message that Manuel must not send Skaranos as his ambassador to the podesta, head of the Genoese colony across the Golden Horn at Galata. One of these days the Genoese will do the Queen of Cities no end of harm if they listen to the counsel of this “cursed trickster and convicted adulterer,” who has already sown religious disunity and persuaded his son-in-law Raoul Myrmex (“the ant”) to buy the island of Thasos (48.13–28).

This is real invective—and “Mazaris” is apparently intending to make a particular political point here about Skaranos’s lack of “soundness” with emphasis on the two crimes of inciting anti-Byzantine feeling in the podesta and orchestrating the purchase of Thasos (perhaps on behalf of George Gattilusio [*Manuel, Ep.* 58]). Significantly, whether inspired by Mazaris’s advice or not, Manuel was to take three months reconquering the island later in 1414 on his way to the Peloponnese (80.22–29). And similar pointed invective comes into play in part two of the work, against the Peloponnesian barons who have rebelled against Manuel II: these are termed “foul, false, treacherous, filthy, and worthless barons” because of their political unsoundness and ingratitude toward the emperor (88.1–2, cf. 70.20, 72.2–7, 11–21, 82.15–27, 86.17–21) and are deemed worthy of being enslaved (88.3–7). The different racial characteristics of the inhabitants of the Peloponnese are also dealt with individually in terms that are hardly complimentary (78.4–27).

In the attacks on Skaranos and the Peloponnesian barons, the author certainly appears to have a specific agenda, but to what extent is it generally possible to accept the invective at face value? Is it simply an abusive attack on bureaucratic ex-colleagues and unpleasant colonials delivered within the framework of the no-man’s-land of Hades by a disgraced public servant—or is it something more? To consider this point, and the aims and sophistication of its humor, we should look at the evidence of the dedication in the Berlin manuscript and the circumstances of the delivery and reception of *Mazaris’s Journey*.

The Dedicatee

To appreciate the work’s primary aim and role as entertainment, it is essential to consider the identity of the dedicatee. The dedication has given rise to the question of whether the work was commissioned by a particular patron and, if so, whether this patron was the emperor Manuel, or his son the despot. In the past the addressee of the

50 See Dennis, *Letters*, 57–58; for the duties of the *logistes*, see Verpeaux, *Pseudo-Kodinos. Traité des Offices*, 186, 323, 337.

epilogue has generally been taken to be the emperor himself, but the editors of the Buffalo edition correctly take him to be Theodore II, despot of the Morea, for from the wording it is clearly Theodore who is meant by “noblest of despots, celebrated prince” (he is also flattered in similar terms at 74.31–33, cf. 54.14–15, 88.6–7). The dedication is present in only one manuscript (MS B: Berol. gr. 173), which, of the three manuscripts, is clearly the most polished in terms of style and presentation. It was obviously intended as a presentation copy for a patron who requested or commissioned the work, for the dedication states that the work (or part of it at least) was composed at the despot’s request. This may not necessarily refer to the composition of the work as a whole, and arguably just one or more of the later sections, those set in the Peloponnese, could have been—and probably were—commissioned by Theodore. Furthermore, the despot was frequently in Constantinople (he is setting off there in the dedication to MS B) and seems to have been present on the occasion of the delivery of Mazari’s first piece, based on Lampadarios’s comments on his son’s performance at court: “He pretends to be shy when he receives a summons from His Majesty the Emperor or from His Serenity the most prudent Despot, to sing something to the lyre or to chant a beautiful composition, either one of the great classics or one of my own. . . .” (54.13–17).⁵¹

If those parts of the narrative set in the Peloponnese were composed at the request or for the amusement of the despot, it is logical to assume that they were prepared with the entertainment of the emperor in mind, since Manuel was in the Peloponnese for the relevant period. Indeed Manuel is greatly lauded, with only minor touches of mockery or criticism, and even these are descriptive, referring to his flashes of anger, rather than critical of his acts as ruler. The second section, on Manuel’s achievements in the Peloponnese, takes pains to flatter the emperor, and there are arguable similarities between Mazari’s description of events and Manuel’s own letter 68 written in 1416 “to the most holy Hieromonks and Spiritual Fathers,” which deals with troubles with rebellious local leaders during and after the construction of the Hexamilion.⁵² If the suitability of such a “scurrilous” work as entertainment for the august emperor Manuel II is questioned, there is corroboration that Manuel himself had a sense of humor: he wrote to the *protosebastos*, “your letter was so full of wit (*ἀστεϊότης*)—it contained just the proper amount of playfulness (*παιδιὰ*)—that when we heard it, it quickly led us to turn from the serious concerns in which the present situation has us trapped and to burst into laughter.”⁵³ In *Epistle* 44 (1403/8) to Demetrios Chrysoloras, Manuel makes fun of the less than energetic Antiochos (doubtless the same Antiochos who features in *Mazari’s Journey*): “And then there is our own Antiochos,

51 Though the despot referred to here could also have been Theodore’s younger brother Andronikos, despot of Thessalonike from 1408 to 1423.

52 Baldwin, “Reflections and Reappraisal,” 350–51.

53 Dennis, *Letters*, 2, written at some point between 1373 and 1390.

the old man who loves sleep so much that he falls asleep on horseback and who would give up everything for sleep. When the tumult at the door prevents him from snoring along in his usual fashion, he curses the noise makers, puts on some kind of shepherd's cap, stuffs his fingers in his ears, and fits his head into the deepest corner" (44.13–17).

It is therefore possible to assume that "Mazaris" the author may have been a member of Manuel's or Theodore's entourage, and specifically writing for entertainment of one or both, perhaps even at their request. If we wished to consider the despot Theodore as Mazaris's primary employer, one of the work's primary aims would still have been that of Manuel's entertainment in the Peloponnese.

The following scenario can therefore be envisaged: the first section of *Mazaris's Journey to Hades* (dated to January 1414: 4.35) is presented to the imperial court in Constantinople, which the despot Theodore appears to have been visiting at that time. It is reasonable to postulate that its reception was a tremendous success. Manuel must already have been planning his expedition to wall the Peloponnese (and perhaps to reduce Thasos), which explains the advice given more than once to Mazaris by Holobolos in this first section that he should move to the Peloponnese: the work is proactively foretelling Manuel's and the court's change of location, as well as foreshadowing a forthcoming humorous production along the same lines as the first, but in a different geographical context. On 25 July 1414, Manuel set sail for the Peloponnese via Thasos, to put down the rebellion. "Mazaris," the author, may have been with him or sailed direct to the Peloponnese; the latter scenario, in fact, makes sense of the fourteen months that he says he has been in the Peloponnese in his remark to Holobolos made in September 1415 (64.9–10). Manuel arrived in the Peloponnese on 29 March 1415 and remained for over a year, returning to Constantinople in March 1416. Parts two to five of the *Journey to Hades* would therefore have been written during the emperor's residence at Mistra in the Peloponnese. The success of the first part having given rise to demands for further entertainment along the same lines, the remaining parts (perhaps written in expectation of the emperor's arrival) would then have been presented in September and October 1415 at the court of the Morea, again to the emperor and his son the despot. This time the targets, though different, are still topical—the barbarity, treachery, and ethnic mix of the local inhabitants, and satirical jibes against the butt of the moment, the court doctor Nikephoros Doukas Palaiologos Malakes (especially his buried gold and profiteering), who perhaps had been complaining too loudly about conditions in the Peloponnese.

According to this reconstruction of the sequence of events, the work was intended primarily for the amusement of the emperor and

his court, but the despot so enjoyed the recitation (he may of course have commissioned the sections set in the Peloponnese) that he asked for a presentation copy: hence a polished copy, MS B, was prepared, and a comic dedication appended which purported to ensure that Theodore would only read it at sea far from the Peloponnese, on his way to Constantinople at some later date, to entertain his fellow passengers, and not while in the Peloponnese where it would cause serious local unrest (cf. 68.17–23 for the Peloponnesians' bellicosity).

If MS B was indeed a presentation copy (or a copy of a presentation copy), what of MS P (Paris. gr. 2991A), which is dated to September 1419?⁵⁴ The manuscript was copied at the behest of Matthew Palaiologos Laskaris, presumably a relation of the Palaiologoi of Mistra, who may have been the Matthew Palaiologos Sgouromales Πελοποννήσιος, Σπαρτιάτης καὶ Λακεδαιμόνιος (f. 491v) who owned the manuscript in 1426. This copy, then, may have been commissioned by an august member of the Peloponnesian aristocracy (the manuscript also contains the *De ceremoniis* of pseudo-Kodinos, which would have been a very valuable reference work for a courtier). For this copy to have been made only four years after the work's composition implies that it had been enthusiastically received and that its tone and content were more than acceptable to the ruling echelons at Mistra. This also suggests that the concept of a disgruntled, underground writer has to be dismissed—instead we have an author whose work may have been officially commissioned by an imperial patron and publicly circulated among members of the court.

Mazaris's Journey: *Delivery and Reception*

The mode of delivery intended for a work affects its structure and the type of humor it projects. Whom, therefore, is *Mazaris's Journey* intended to entertain and in what mode? The level of language is clearly the atticizing language used at court, together with some technical and Latinizing vocabulary. This presupposes a relatively sophisticated and educated audience, like the dedicatee, the despot Theodore. The first section of *Mazaris's Journey* contains some fifty references to classical texts, including those of Aristophanes, Demosthenes, Euripides, Homer, Menander, Hesiod, Plato, and Theocritus, as well as others to scriptural and patristic works. Frequently the attribution to a particular author is not given, and the audience is obviously expected to be able to place the allusion or at least recognize the quotation as a well-known tag. Interestingly, here, the allusions come from the Byzantine literary canon—those works normally read during the course of a good education—and there are no recognizably obscure citations (though there are some that we cannot now place). In addition it is now recognized that there are verbal echoes of more

54 For a discussion of the manuscript, see Barry et al., *Mazaris's Journey*, xxxi (above, n. 3); Verpeaux, *Pseudo-Kodinos. Traité des Offices*, 44–47 (above, n. 28).

contemporary works such as Manuel II's own letters, which would have been publicly delivered and thus well known to the court.⁵⁵

The first part of *Mazaris's Journey* clearly addresses an audience, as three references indicate (2.14, 4.9–10, 60.20, cf. 80.17). In addition the dedication speaks of part of the work being read out loud on board ship on the way back to Constantinople:

At the behest of Your Highness, Noblest of Despots, I have written this to the best of my ability, more in a playful vein than with a serious purpose. . . . However, since I have completed the assignment of Your Highness with all zeal and without delay, pray keep your part of the arrangement, Celebrated Prince, which was that this is not to be read in public (ἐν θεάτρῳ, i.e., out loud to an audience) nor in this country before the inhabitants of the land of Pelops ... Thus you will make me happy by keeping to the terms of our agreement, you will provide entertainment for your fellow-passengers by reading this out, and you will not hurt the feelings of the Peloponnesians, since they will not hear it (98.1–2, 7–16).

It was customary for Byzantine writers from the eleventh century on to present their works to an audience, sometimes at a *theatron*—a term that of course originally meant “theatre,” but which came to mean a reading to a patron and/or private literary circle.⁵⁶ Histories, eulogies, speeches, theological treatises—even letters—were written to be read out loud. It was to such an audience in the underworld that Holobolos presented the discourses of the unfortunate Asan, “beloved uncle” of the emperor,⁵⁷ drawing a crowd of orators and philosophers to his performances (τὸ θεάτρον). He sends the following message to Asan:

Just as in the imperial palace I never missed an opportunity to share your writings with His Majesty and the others, so I remember you here in Hades too, and at night I repeat to great Pluto and Persephone your crystal-clear disquisition on the resurrection of the dead, while in the daytime I enjoy the pleasure of reciting before Minos, Aeacus, and Rhadamanthys everything you wrote during your entire career with that easy grace, that faultless and irreproachable command of Greek—all your sixty-nine senseless

55 Baldwin, “Reflections and Reappraisal,” 350–51 (above, n. 1).

56 M. Mullett, “Aristocracy and Patronage in the Literary Circles of Comnenian Constantinople,” in *The Byzantine Aristocracy*, ed. Angold, 173–201 (above, n. 12); for the performance

of literary texts, see also C. Cupane, “*Deûte, proskarterísate mikrón, o néoi pántes*. Note sulla ricezione primaria e sul pubblico della letteratura greca medievale,” *Δίπτυχα* 6 (1994–95): 147–68.

57 *Mazaris's Journey*, 56.19. Asan is probably Constantine Asanes, addressee

of Manuel's Letters 18 and 30; *PLP* 1038. Demetrios Kydonēs calls him Manuel's “uncle” (R.-J. Loenertz, ed., *Démétrius Cydonès. Correspondance* [Vatican City, 1956], *Ep.* 3 [August 1409]).

and muddled discourses. My performances draw a full house of dead orators and philosophers. Some of the audience jump with glee, others laugh sardonically, and still others fill the air with applause and pray to Clotho to snip off your lifethread before your time, so that you may come all the sooner to the realm of Hades, because they are all so impatient to see you in person and hear from your own lips your delightful (or so you think) rhapsodies.⁵⁸

Publicly poking fun at the illiterate or the uneducated letter-writer was a frequent *topos*, as Manuel's letters demonstrate; in *Epistle* 28.18–19 he remarks, “You always provide the audience (τὸ θεῖατρον) with a chance to jeer, inasmuch as you present yourself before all as a noble athlete,” while in *Mazaris's Journey* the *myrtaitēs* Andronikos (who had “clearly been a quotable wag at court”)⁵⁹ is apparently criticized on several occasions for bad or colloquial Greek (10.14–15, 26.3, 26.28–9), as are the Lakonians or “Tzakonians” (64.12–16). Letters, like discourses, were regularly performed publicly to a literary circle, and despite their apparent intimacy of tone were intended for a wider audience: Margaret Mullett characterizes the essence of the Byzantine letter as lying “in its being intimate and confidential and intended for publication”—one might also add “for performance.”⁶⁰ In seven of the sixty-eight letters in his correspondence (*Epistles* 9, 24, 27, 32, 34, 44, 61), Manuel II complimented his correspondents on the applause their letters received when delivered in front of the court. *Ep.* 30.4 speaks of “everyone who listened to it”; at 32.4–6, “They (the hearers) were beaming with joy and almost leaping about in their desire to applaud”; in 9.2–7 to Tribolēs he comments, “We made a serious effort to have your letter read before as many people as you would wish, and you surely wished a large number to hear it, confident in your literary skill and expecting to be praised for it. And this is just what happened. For the entire audience applauded and was full of admiration as the letter was read by its “grandfather” [i.e., Tribolēs' teacher]. Nor was he able to conceal his own pleasure as the theater was shaken by applause and by praise. . . .” *Epistle* 27.9 to Theodore Kaukadenos talks of people stamping their feet and shouting with joy when his production was read. The term *theatron* is specifically used of the audience on three occasions (*Epistles* 9.7, 27.2, 28.19). Other letters speak of adverse receptions, and *Epistles* 64.27–35, probably to the recalcitrant bishop Makarios in 1409,

⁵⁸ *Mazaris's Journey*, 56.17–58.12 (above, n. 5). The *Letters* of Demetrios Kydonēs (*Epp.* 3, 71, 109, 155, 186, 426) depict Constantine Asanes as well-educated and as an important advisor to both John V and Manuel; he was also one of the main opponents of Palamism (Dennis, *Letters*, 28).

⁵⁹ Baldwin, “Reflections and Reappraisal,” 354.

⁶⁰ See M. Mullett, “The Byzantine Letter,” in M. Mullett and R. Scott, eds., *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition* (Birmingham, 1981), 75–93, esp. 77.

is a direct parallel to the reaction gained by Asan: “Some grieved over you, others laughed, but everyone joined in jeering at you when your letter was read. . . . You wanted a large number to attend the performance, and for your sake so it turned out, those present being men of letters—they bestowed the appropriate honor on you and . . . (the contest) brought about universal insults as your fitting reward.”

Clearly, from the references to auditors, *Mazaris's Journey to Hades*, like other works of the period, was intended for performance to a court circle. This circle would have included the emperor and, for those parts composed and delivered in the Peloponnese, his son Theodore: the compliments to both—echoes of the emperor's own writings and praise of the despot's generosity (74.31–3, cf. 54.14–15, 88.6–7)—were thus entirely apposite. Certainly the puns on names and mocking descriptions imply intimate personal knowledge of the courtiers targeted, and the auditors can be supposed to have been the colleagues and children of those bureaucrats whom the narrator satirizes, and who are themselves satirized, often through their own fathers' mouths. Indeed, the term *συναναστρέφομένων*, “courtiers,” or colleagues at the palace, the last word of the work's title, is repeated some dozen times in the text, almost as a kind of refrain.⁶¹

This aspect of the work has generally been ignored: “it might be thought a foolhardy man who would attack so many luminaries of the time, not excluding the emperor himself,” comments Baldwin.⁶² Similarly the editors of the Buffalo seminar suggest (p. xix) that, safe in the knowledge that he was soon to start a new life far from Constantinople, the author, in the first part of the work, was able to find an outlet for his frustration in ridiculing the members of the emperor's court. But the work was intended for recitation—and recitation to the very people it was satirizing, or to their colleagues, children, and successors. This changes the focus and tone of the satire, as was noted by Barker in 1969, who perceived that the fact that the work might have been written for Manuel's amusement would soften the seriousness of its vituperation and violent tone, particularly when Manuel himself was being criticized. He also noted that “Manuel had a considerable sense of humor and was quite capable of enjoying a good literary joke at his court's expense, if not also his own to some extent.”⁶³ At the commencement of the work (4.8–11), the narrator specifically defines his audience as the imperial court, stating that “it

61 *Mazaris's Journey*, 2.4, 4.11, 6.21–22, 8.17–18, 12.18–19, 20.3, 26.32, 38.14, 42.31, 44.1, 64.3; Baldwin, “Reflections and Reappraisal,” 351 (above, n. 1).

62 Baldwin, “Reflections and Reappraisal,” 349–50.

63 Barker, *Manuel II Paleologus*, 407 n. 19 (above, n. 3) (if we assume that the dedicatory epilogue was addressed to Manuel). The passages in question primarily criticize the emperor's bad temper (38.2, 40.14–15, 64.30). The same approach is also,

of course, true of the *Skattablatas*: if written between 1408 and 1423, it might well have been intended to make fun of a current favorite in a public performance in front of the despot, Manuel's son Andronikos, and his court.

is my intention, gentlemen, to describe to the best of my ability what I heard from some of the dead upon my arrival there and what I saw during my brief sojourn—for the benefit of all, and more especially those associated with the Emperor's court (τοῖς τε ἄλλοις ἅπασιν, οὐχ ἥκιστα δέ γε τοῖς συναναστρεφόμενοις ταῖς βασιλικαῖς αὐλαῖς).” And later in his letter to Holobolos about the iniquities of the inhabitants of the Peloponnese, Mazaris considers addressing a wider audience, that of all the dead, because the living already know what he is going to say (80.16–18).

The oral delivery and the reception of any work necessarily impact on its humor. With luck, if we factor in the possibility of oral delivery to an informed audience, the humor of *Mazaris's Journey* can be rehabilitated and the work begin at last to gain credence as an entertaining satire, even if not yet as a literary masterpiece. When a satirical piece is written specifically for the amusement of those it is satirizing, the tone of the humor becomes softened (as noted by Barker), and furthermore, when a satirical piece is delivered orally in the actual presence of those whom it is “sending up,” especially when these are of superior or equal status to the narrator, the tone of the humor becomes even less of a personal attack. Such circumstances of presentation frequently provide the opportunity to air favorite stock-jokes, well-worn personal allusions, and absurd scenarios that can poke fun at third parties known to both. In the context of oral delivery, jokes (whether descriptive, ridiculous, or abusive) can be particularized by intonation, facial expressions, and dramatic gestures, in such simple ways as pointing at or playing at the intended targets.

It must be remembered that spoken and written texts have very different characteristics: a radio or television script can appear banal when read as a written text, but hilarious when delivered in its intended medium. Whereas in a written text the reader is in control, in an orally delivered text the speaker controls the pace, timing, and emphasis and can enhance the effect by gesture, intonation, and innuendo. An obvious example of the difference between oral delivery and written text is the use of repetition, which is a much more acceptable device—indeed essential for structure and comprehension—when a lengthy piece is delivered orally. The repetition of details of the plot and characterization and the reiteration of jokes (such as the frequent references to Mazaris's gout) help to give cohesion to the whole in the minds of its auditors, and act as structural links. In fact the repetition of jokes is a very legitimate form of humor enhancement in orally delivered pieces, though tedious in works intended to be read as literary texts. One example occurs at the conclusion to the first part of the narrative where Holobolos exhorts Mazaris to return with all speed to the upper world and remain silent about Holobolos's advice to him to

relocate to the Peloponnese. The passage, explicitly based on Hesiod's description of Envy in *Works and Days* (25–26), fails to engage the interest of the modern reader—but we should imagine that the very list of references to members of the court hierarchy was particularized for an audience by the presence of these same dignitaries among them, who may well have been specifically targeted by the performer:

For down here they not only look critically at those who do well in life, but, in Hesiod's words,

The beggar detests the beggar, the poet the poet,
the carpenter the carpenter,

and just as in the world above a neighbor's good repute, as somebody has put it, stings the envious, so here in Hades too . . . the patriarch envies the patriarch, the archbishop the archbishop, the bishop the bishop, the monk the monk, the satrap the satrap, the minister the minister, the governor the governor, the magistrate the magistrate, the general the general, the admiral the admiral, the judge the judge, the scribe the scribe, the secretary the secretary . . . to top it all the man with gout in hands and feet envies the one with gouty feet only. . . . And not only are they all without exception jealous of each other, but they are actually spiteful: everyone is all the time tricking and blackmailing everyone else, both in Hades and in the upper world. . . . (58.15–60.3)

The reference to gout, at the end of the list, channels the attention of the audience back to the narrator/performer himself, who has been complaining of his gout throughout the work, and the point is doubtless emphasized by gestures and appropriate signs of distress. In this way the satire, directed first at the officials present, is turned against the authorial narrator himself in a twist that makes him again a figure of fun.

If it can be accepted that the work was intended for oral presentation to a court audience, including the emperor and perhaps the despot (for the first section), and both the emperor and the despot (for those sections set in the Peloponnese), the fragmented structure is no longer a problem in terms of the literary drawbacks of the piece. The “sequels” or appendages were not components of a single “organic” composition, but composed later by popular demand, and for separate performance in response to a new geographical setting and milieu, target(s) and audience—indeed the implication of the dedication of the Berlin MS is that the despot Theodore commissioned at least some of the later pieces for performance at his court in the Peloponnese.

Furthermore, “scurrility,” as expressed in criticism of the court and its officials, is not only understandable, but essential for such a satire to be a success: the two main characters, Mazaris and his old friend

Holobolos, are both said to have been sacked for misconduct and demoted, like Holobolos's ex-boss Padiates. Their critical comments on those who have replaced them—and the tone of the first part of the work as a whole—are therefore quite naturally abusive. In addition, the reputation for scurrility depends mainly on the work's intensive allusion to Aristophanes' plays, most notably the *Clouds*, and on an all-pervading Byzantine passion for alliteration and puns. The dialogue's addiction to elaborate paronomasia and word play may have earned it modern condemnation, but it must also be remembered that puns are much more successful when delivered in the presence of their target.⁶⁴ In such a context well-worn complaints and old jokes could be aired, as in the reference to the palace, the center of the bureaucracy, not as Παλάτι but as Παλαιὰ Ἄτη or Old Destruction (translated by the editors as "Old Misery Hall" [10.32, 12.6, 38.13, 52.14]). Among colleagues the reiterated complaints about the bureaucracy as a place of fraud, deceit, and cut-throat rivalry would no doubt have struck a chord—as indeed they would to any public servant in the twenty-first century.⁶⁵

Rather than being an exercise in obscenity and abuse, the text gives us a picture of voluble, self-assertive, highly competitive, and outspoken professional rivals, unafraid of personal comment, and marked by a ready wit, presence of mind, and the ability to score off each other in public encounters. This tells us a great deal about officials at the fifteenth-century Byzantine court.⁶⁶ What is generally taken as abuse in our text is in fact exuberant exhibitionism expressed in alliterative wordplay, highly flavored with sexual innuendo. The point of most of the references may be obscure to us, but allusions now lost may once have called forth sniggers or even gales of laughter from the auditors.

Conclusion

Mazaris himself at the end of the first part of the work describes his dialogue as his "account—a tearful rather than a cheerful one—of my involuntary trip, which I have described to the best of my ability, perhaps as a hoax (παιδιά), perhaps as a moral lesson (παιδεία) in which earnestness is more important than fun" (60.20–22). This certainly does not sound like the apologia of a public servant who has been

⁶⁴ In any case, "Mazaris" is only, typically in Byzantium, following his model Aristophanes (if not as skillfully): "in the service of satire, abuse, parody, irony, and surrealistic absurdity are countless plays on words, comic distortions of proper names, ludicrous and extravagant compounds. . . . It is primarily in his verbal pyrotechnics that the genius of Aristophanes resides" (J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene*

Language in Attic Comedy, 2nd ed. [New Haven, 1992], 1). According to Baldwin ("Reflections and Reappraisal," 357), Mazaris's canon combines personal abuse with a derisive pun on the victim's name.

⁶⁵ Note, for example, *Mazaris's Journey*, 24.16–18, 28.7–9, 44.31–46.2, 48.4–5, and 58.31–60.3 (above, n. 5).

⁶⁶ Magdalino, "Byzantine Snobbery," 69 (above, n. 12), points out that for the

Byzantines solid credentials were good, but it was essential to have the ability to score points in public encounters, while a "ceaseless, intoxicating, bewildering flow of words" was the most vital quality in ensuring a successful career (certainly, politicians appear to have changed very little).

disgraced and ostracized. The primary intention of the work is to amuse, and Mazaris's dedication to Theodore II, at the end of the Berlin manuscript, speaks of his having written the work, to the best of his ability, "more in a playful vein than with a serious purpose" (παίζων γε μάλλον ἢ σπουδάζων: 98.2). Here, significantly, he compares his role to that of Thersites, the lame, outspoken, and much-insulted buffoon of book two of Homer's *Iliad* (and the reader should remember that "Mazaris" has been complaining of his gout throughout the work): "Such, indeed, has been the munificence you have shown me . . . that had you ordered me to do a dance in the role of Thersites, I would not have hesitated to give my limping performance: so much have I been captivated by your magical charm, Most Serene Highness and Most Gracious of Princes" (98.4–7).

One of the features of the late empire which has affected modern reception of *Mazaris's Journey* is the former's attitude toward attacks on the recently dead, which our society finds unacceptable. Well-known historical personalities are not generally subject to such taboos, and this is shown to be true of the Byzantines in the *Timarion*. The Byzantines also had no issues with satirical attacks on recently deceased rulers and officials when, for example, these comprised the evil tyrant Andronikos I or his rascally henchman Stephen Hagiochristophorites.⁶⁷ Indeed, Byzantines in the fifteenth century apparently had few such concerns about mocking their dead colleagues, for satirical attacks in *Mazaris's Journey* were launched equally on the living and on those who had lately died. In the first section, the majority of those attacked are clearly said to have been deceased colleagues. Holobolos, Padiates, Antiochos, Potamios, Pepagomenos, Lampadarios, Bartholomeos de Alagaskos, Klaudiotes, and Aspietaos are all residents of the underworld, the only major exceptions being Philommates, Lampadarios's sons, and Skaranos. In fact the narrator is at great pains to ensure that his auditors are reminded at frequent intervals of the present status of his protagonists—the term ἐκείνος, "deceased," used to qualify a proper name, occurs sometimes more than three times on a single page (for example, 10.11, 15, 31; 34.3, 16, 26, 27, 29; 36.17, 19, 20, 28, 29; 44.7, 14, 30). This applies primarily to the first part of the work, while in the sections set in the Peloponnese those satirized, like the doctor Malakes, tend to be very much alive. The only figures who are obviously deceased at this point are Holobolos himself and characters who facilitate communication between the two worlds, such as the Peloponnesian Synadenos Kormeias, the bearer of Holobolos's letter to Malakes (92.26–27, 94.4–5, cf. 64.12)—the question of how a letter can be carried from Hades is not adequately addressed—and "the deceased physician Angelos, who had all that worry in the

67 Manaphes, "Ἀνέκδοτος νεκρικός διάλογος," 308–22 (above, n. 10); Garland, "A Treasury Minister in Hell," 481–99 (above, n. 10).

Peloponnese over his outstanding bills and became so discouraged that he took the trip to Hades,” who informs Holobolos about the miseries Malakes is undergoing (90.7–10).

Another suggestion for a carrier of a communication to the underworld (Mazaris’s letter on the Peloponnese to Holobolos) is the aged poet Moschos at Sparta, “as old as Methuselah, a cripple and a useless burden upon the Lacedaemonian economy” (70.9–12, cf. 74.7–11), while Malakes’ final report to Holobolos is dispatched through “the prematurely deceased Thessalian Chrysaphes, who has not even a piece of lead to his name” (96.7–9).

There is, arguably, an underlying reason why *Mazaris’s Journey* states no fewer than three times that Padiates and the *myrtaitēs* Andronikos are dead—the audience was likely to forget that “fact.” The term ἐκείνος is not used in the same way in the *Timarion* of the historical characters who are there depicted as deceased, and in *Mazaris’s Journey* is surely tautological. By definition anyone met in the underworld might be expected to have terminally encountered the Grim Reaper, yet every character with whom Mazaris converses in the underworld is clearly labeled as deceased: the only one who is not is Melgouzes the “former milker of goats,” the term *former* perhaps implying his previous life in the world above (44.4–5). This should alert us to the distinct possibility that these characters were in fact not only not dead, but present as large as life in the audience. There is, after all, no corroborative evidence from other sources that any of the protagonists were in fact dead by the time of the composition and performance of *Mazaris’s Journey*. The reiteration of the term ἐκείνος would only have been necessary if the audience were not, in fact, sure which of their number were supposed to have handed in their job portfolios and to be currently residing in the underworld.

If that were the case then, despite the underworld setting, all protagonists may still have been alive and at court. And, if so, we must dismiss *Mazaris’s Journey* as a source of information on the disgrace or death of early-fifteenth-century officials. The work is generally taken as a terminus ante quem (no pun intended) for Potamios, Antiochos, Pepagomenos, and others.⁶⁸ Yet the work would certainly have been

68 PLP 23601, 1038, 22346. Dennis, *Letters*, 48, 55; Baldwin, “Reflections and Reappraisal,” 353. This explanation could also get round some of the knottier prosopographical questions: we know that a Doctor Pepagomenos accompanied Manuel to the Peloponnese in 1415. Our “deceased” doctor (34.26–40.9) can now be identified with this Pepagomenos, who was later to be the correspondent of Bessarion

and the writer of a monody on the death of Kleope Palaiologina in 1433 (PLP 22359; Baldwin, “Reflections and Reappraisal,” 353 [above, n. 1]; “Pepagomenos, Demetrios,” ODB 3: 1627). Antiochos and Potamios to whom Manuel II wrote or whom he mentioned in his letters ca. 1403–1408 (*Epp.* 44, 47 [above, n. 33]) could still have been alive. Also there is no reason why Gemistos Plethon, exiled ca. 1410 to Mistra, cannot

have been one of the living judges punningly mentioned at 18.31, especially because we are postulating performance of at least some sections of this work in the Peloponnese, where Plethon headed the despot’s intellectual circle.

more entertaining if it insulted these courtiers and their families before their faces and dwelt on the details of inter-office rivalry in the presence of both parties: Aspietaos waiting for the arrival in the underworld of Staphidakes to bring a charge of corruption against him; the intellectual Constantine Asanes hearing how irreverently his philosophical orations are received in Hades; Holobolos looking forward shortly to biting off the nose of his nephew Alexios “the varmint” in the afterlife. Should we be postulating a scenario in which Papagomenos, the “certified killer” who poisoned himself and others by mistake, was actually a highly respected medical figure present in the audience? And one in which the illustrious parakoimomenos Antiochos was described to his face as being obsessively in love and wildly impatient for his inamorata’s decease so he could be reunited with her in the underworld?

The character “Mazaris” in this case is indubitably a fiction: what of Padiates and Holobolos? Possibly they, too, were convenient fictions with which to satirize the eternal failings of the bureaucracy. On the other hand, they might well have been imperial servants, well-known figures at court, who in the topsy-turvy world of *Mazaris’s Journey* follow comic career paths and undergo fictional deaths for the amusement of their colleagues, who can thus enjoy laughing at the exaggerated or imaginary failings of these “naked exhibitionists” (γυμνοί τε καὶ ἀπεψολωμένοι, cf. Ar., *Ach.* 161), scarred with the whip-marks that characterized corrupt bureaucrats in the underworld (6.11, 60.12–13).

Holobolos tells Mazaris that he, too, will eventually “make the trip from Hellas to hell (ἐς μόνον . . . ἀπὸ Μώρας) in a happy, cheerful mood, reflecting that, as Homer says, ‘you cannot possibly elude your fate, even if you lock yourself up in your room’” (10.4–7). What a unique light this work would shed on our perceptions of Byzantine humor in the fifteenth century, if the afterlife was still in store for *all* the protagonists! We would be forced to undertake a reappraisal of the abusive humor of *Mazaris’s Journey*, if its ex-courtiers had yet to make their trip “from the Peloponnese to Paradise,” and if their residence in Hades had only been a narrative convenience for the purposes of the work—an elaborate and highly successful series of jokes conceived for the entertainment of Manuel II and his son, the despot Theodore II, and their courts.

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